A New Illustrated History of Taiwan

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Chapter 13

The February 28 Incident
1. The War Generation

If human societies do possess a “collective memory” (and we should bear in mind that such a memory would contain both happy events and terrible ones), then the February 28 Incident has been “a collective nightmare” for Taiwanese society. People who are having a nightmare want to call out but cannot make a sound; they want to lift a heavy weight off their chest but cannot free themselves from it; when they wake up from the nightmare, the feeling of terror remains. How much worse it would be if the nightmare lasted for over forty years! Today, more than sixty years on, the malign influence of this nightmare still continues to haunt the people of Taiwan. If we want once and for all to exorcise this nightmare, we must first look at it squarely, analyze it, and let it become an objective piece of common knowledge for all Taiwanese.

In the foreword to this post-war section we said that the younger generation of Taiwanese enthusiastically welcomed “Retrocession.” Who could have guessed that they would suffer defeat and frustration as well as over forty years of enforced silence? If one wants to understand post-1945 Taiwanese history, one must gain a thorough understanding of this generation, the Taiwanese who were aged between roughly fifteen and twenty-five years old at the time of the Japanese defeat. I call them “the war generation,” formed as they were by the Japanese colonial government’s education and wartime mobilization. They grew up at a time when Japanese colonial rule was entering a period of stability and maturity, and when the effects of colonial education were becoming very clear. Therefore the colonizers’ ideas of governance marked this generation very deeply. Their education taught them to love their country, and their country was Japan. What they learned as history was the history of Japan with an imperial slant to it. Their education
did impart rich and well-founded knowledge (both scientific knowledge and information for everyday living) and also instilled a strong concept of heimat (a German-influenced Japanese educational goal) and love of their native land. Their ethical education could be described as of a high standard, but unfortunately it was strongly colored by militaristic ideology. In the education given to this generation, Taiwan was a land with no past—a spatial entity minus its history. Their knowledge of Chinese history and culture was almost non-existent.

By the end of 1937, both the Kōrinka Movement and wartime mobilization were being vigorously promoted and they spread like wildfire across Taiwan. Is there anything in the world that increases a society’s internal cohesion as much as war? In response to what was ostensibly the Emperor’s call to fight, the hot-headed young people of Taiwan, both men and women, signed or wrote letters in blood to increase their chances of joining the army to fight overseas. They were a new generation, a generation who spoke Japanese and had a different view of life and a different conception of history from their parents and grandparents. The older generations of Taiwanese could recall or had heard of the Japanese occupation of Taiwan as a bloody process; from personal experience they understood the unfair and unequal treatment in a colonial society. However, the younger generation had lived during a period of such slogans as “Japan and Taiwan blend together,” “Japan and Taiwan are one,” and corresponding policies based on the legal equality of Taiwanese and Japanese, so it was not easy for them to see the situation clearly.

However, history did not allocate enough time to the Japanese rulers. Taiwanese people are not ethnic Japanese, a fact that could not be altered or obscured in a short period. Most Taiwanese people of Han Chinese ancestry knew that their ancestors had come from
the mainland. When a former Taiwanese-born Japanese soldier was asked by an American reporter whether or not he regarded himself as Japanese, he replied: “No. My father has always told me since I was a child that we came from T'angshan (referring to Mainland China) and that we are not Japanese.” But when he spoke about fighting for Japan, he went on to say emphatically: “In that period we were Japanese, and would naturally show our loyalty to our country.” These two apparently contradictory statements are not actually in conflict. The former refers to ethnic group, and the latter refers to loyalty to one's country. In other words, Taiwanese people regarded Japan as their country and referred to it respectfully using the Japanese term mikuni (the sacred country); in this sense Taiwanese people were Japanese. But with respect to ethnicity, Taiwanese people were not Japanese. Here we can see how most of the Taiwanese who had received a Japanese education clearly understood that they were not Japanese but rather the descendants of ethnic Han. This was the ethnic rift which slogans like “Japan and Taiwan are one” were urgently trying to close. If Japanese rule had lasted long enough, this fissure may well have been eliminated. However, when Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945, this fissure behaved as fissures often do: because it was the line where two articles made of different materials had been joined together, it ripped apart easily.

2. Welcoming the Dawn of a New Era

After Retrocession, Taiwanese people showed clearly by their actions that they were pleased with the new situation: they quickly started to study all things Chinese as well as the new national language (“standard” Chinese, which is based on the Peking dialect and is referred to in English as Mandarin). However, fifty years of separation and the enormous changes that had taken place in China
resulted in lack of knowledge of the fatherland among Taiwanese. Of even more serious consequence was that the eight years between 1937 and 1945 had been taken up in Taiwan by the Kōminka Movement and the mobilization for war, while in China these eight years constituted the War of Resistance against Japan. Japan had invaded Chinese territory in the early 1930s, and this, followed by eight years of the War of Resistance, had created very deep anti-Japanese feelings among Chinese people—feelings which even today are easily stirred up. The Taiwanese were on the opposite side to the Chinese during the Second World War and on the same side as the Japanese. Of course the Taiwanese had no way of comprehending the feeling of enmity that Chinese people bore towards the Japanese. Conversely, the Chinese people had no idea of the effects of Japanese colonial rule (both positive and negative) on the Taiwanese.

Acting within an understanding with the Allied forces, the government of the Republic of China took over Taiwan. On August 29, 1945, Chiang Kai-shek (also known as Chiang Chung-cheng) appointed the Governor of Fukien (Fujian) Province, Ch’én Yí (Ch’én I), as the Chief Executive of the administration on Taiwan. On September 1, Ch’én Yí also became commander-in-chief of the Taiwan Provincial Garrison. On October 17, the 75th Division landed at Keelung as an advance party of the 70th Army, which was to take over control of Taiwan. Taiwanese people were extremely excited by the news that soldiers from the fatherland were to land on Taiwan. Not only people from nearby Taipei, but also many people from as far away as Taichung, Tainan, and Kaohsiung came to welcome the nation’s troops arriving at Keelung, so the harbor was packed with people. The attire of the Chinese national troops was completely different from that of the Japanese army with which the Taiwanese people were familiar. The Chinese troops did not look tidy, they looked ragged and shabby. Each of them carried
an umbrella on his back; some of them shouldered woks, cooking utensils, bedding, and other items; the gaiters they wore made their calves look fat and clumsy. Confronted with such strange attire young Taiwanese could not but be disappointed. Perhaps out of the desire to protect the reputation of the Chinese troops and also to serve as an explanation to themselves, the older generation explained: “Chinese troops normally strap lead sheets to their legs when marching as a method of training. Then when they take them off they can run like the wind. Those umbrellas that they carry are used as parachutes.” Only by means of such stories could anyone believe that an army like the Chinese had defeated the well-equipped and professional-looking Japanese army. The writer Wu Cho-liu, who likewise thought it was all a bit strange but desperately wanted to put a positive spin on it, wrote that at the time he “had an illusion that behind the Chinese troops’ shabby appearance lies the essence of the nation’s spirit.” In a short time, descriptions of the Chinese troops’ landing and the accompanying “explanations” had reached every part of the island. Many Taiwanese people who were not present at the Keelung landing could recall this historic scene long afterwards as if they had seen it with their own eyes.

On October 24, Ch'en Yi arrived in Taipei. Crowds of people went to welcome him at Sungshan Airport; those who were unable to squeeze onto buses made their way there on foot. The welcome people bestowed on Ch'en Yi at the Sungshan Airport was as enthusiastic as that given to the troops at Keelung harbor. The following day saw the formal establishment of the government office known as the Taiwan Provincial Administrative Executive Office (T'ai-wan-sheng hsheng-cheng chang-kuan kung-shiu), which replaced the Government-General of Taiwan (Taiwan Sōtokufu) as the supreme authority on Taiwan. On the same day the official ceremony of the “Surrender [of the Japanese forces] in the Chinese Theater of War,
13.1 Taiwanese students line the road to welcome the Nationalist army's arrival on Taiwan. (Courtesy of the Central News Agency)

13.2 "Welcoming Retrocession" calligraphy by Dr. Chang Ch'i-lang. Chang Ch'i-lang, a doctor in Hualien, wrote the characters for "welcome" (at the bottom) and four couplets (the eight vertical lines above). The left line of the second couplet reads: "51 years in bondage and near to death, now rebirth is at hand" (referring to the end of Japanese rule). At the time of writing Chang Ch'i-lang (1888-1947) could not have foreseen that within a year and half, he and two of his sons, the eldest, Chang Tsung-jen, and his third son, Chang Kuo-jen, would be executed by the Nationalist army in April 1947. (Courtesy of Chang An-man)
13.3 The ceremony for "Receiving [Japanese] Surrender in the Chinese Theater of War, Taiwan Province." The photo shows Ch'en Yi, (on the right), the Chief Executive of the Taiwan Provincial Administration, receiving, in his capacity as the representative of the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the Chinese Theater of War, the formal document of surrender from the Japanese Tenth Area Army's Chief of Staff, Haruki Isayama. The ceremony took place in the Taipei Citizens' Hall (originally the Taihoku Citizens' Hall) on October 25, 1945. (Courtesy of Kaohsiung Museum of History)

13.4 Crowds gathered outside Taipei Citizens' Hall for the surrender ceremony. (Courtesy of the Central News Agency)
Taiwan Province" marked the formal end of Japanese colonial rule in Taiwan and the beginning of rule by the Nationalist government. October 25 thus became "Taiwan Retrocession Day," as important a holiday as the "Beginning of Government Day" (June 17) had been during the period of colonial rule, for it marked the start of the new government.

The fantastic tales surrounding the Chinese army could only suffice as explanation for a short time. The enthusiasm and idealism at first evinced by the Taiwanese for the return to "the embrace of the fatherland" soon began to wane and then to disappear in the face of actual contact. The new provincial government officials were corrupt; the soldiers lacked discipline and harassed the people, taking whatever they pleased from them. The economy was in ruins, the currency exchange rate in relation to the currency of mainland China was unreasonable, and the price of goods skyrocketed. All these factors made the Taiwanese extremely dissatisfied. Moreover, after the end of the war, the Taiwanese who had been recruited and sent abroad under the Japanese wartime mobilization began to return home. The Allied Forces' treatment of the tens of thousands of Taiwanese POWs in Southeast Asia was mostly acceptable. It was only the Taiwanese on Hainan Island, who had surrendered to the Chinese army, who met with cruel treatment. The corruption and indifference of the Chinese army led to starvation and disease among POWs. As

13.5 A cartoon which appeared in Hsin Hsin (New New) magazine in May 1946. The cartoon is titled: "Money can't keep up with the goods." Cartoonist: Yeh Ta-hsien (aka Yeh Hung-chia). (Source: Hsin Hsin, no. 4-5, May 1946)
they had no hope of being repatriated they had to fall back on their own resources and find their own way home. But during the process many of them lost their lives, and this created anger and resentment towards the government among the Hainan Island returnees and their families.

At the time of the Japanese surrender there were approximately 310,000 Japanese people living in Taiwan, including children. On December 25, 1945, the repatriation of these Japanese began. All their fixed assets were confiscated and they were only allowed to take with them basic hand luggage and 1000 yen. Among these Japanese returnees were many Taiwanese-born Japanese. Many Taiwanese people vividly remembered the pitiéful and resigned air of the departing Japanese. Although people were unhappy with the
After the war the 200,000 Japanese soldiers in Taiwan were transferred back to Japan. (Source: Chu Ch’uan-yü, ed., 1962)

framework of a colonial society, there were nevertheless friendly sentiments between the Japanese teachers resident in Taiwan and their Taiwanese students. Many Japanese also felt a sense of attachment to what had become, by virtue of birthplace and long-term residence, their homeland of Taiwan. These factors meant that decades after repatriation there continued to exist a bond between many Japanese and Taiwanese that transcended political and other obstacles. Through organizations such as “Former Classmates,” teachers and students were able to continue their relationships by correspondence and sometimes by special reunions of students, teachers, and their families.

We mentioned above that Taiwanese people of Han ancestry knew that their forefathers came from China. Taiwan’s situation as
13.8 A Japanese soldier undergoing inspection prior to repatriation. (Source: the Taipei 2/28 Memorial Museum)
a Japanese colony was very different from that of Korea, where the entire country had been reduced to the status of a colony, so that Koreans, whether high- or low-born, had nowhere to retreat to. Taiwan, however, was ceded from China to Japan, and thus while Han Taiwanese were separated from their cultural and political parent body, the continued existence of their Chinese ancestral homeland on the opposite side of the Strait was an ever-present factor, even though the influence of this factor gradually diminished with the passage of time. During the period of Japanese rule, some Taiwanese moved to mainland China because of their dissatisfaction with colonial rule or other reasons. After the Retrocession of Taiwan many of these people returned to Taiwan. Local Taiwanese referred to these people as “half Mainlander” (pao-shan), meaning “half Taiwanese and half Mainlander.” In later usage, this term “half Mainlander” took on special, largely political, meanings. The term referred to those Taiwanese people who had lived in mainland China and had close connections with the Chinese Nationalist Party (aka KMT, abbreviated from Chung-kuo Kuo-min-tang) there and who then returned to their hometowns after the Retrocession of Taiwan. Both before and after Retrocession these people played special roles, sometimes positive and sometimes negative. Some were believed to have provided the KMT with lists of leading figures in Taiwanese society during the bloody repression of the February 28 Incident.

13.9 Our Baggage Being Inspected on the Kaohsiung Dockside by Shiozawa Ryō. Due to the heavy American bombing towards the end of the war, the Japanese art teacher Shiozawa Ryō evacuated the women students from Taipei Teacher Training College south to the town Ts’ao’ün, Taichū Prefecture, and dispersed them to Shuangting Village. When Japan lost the war, this group travelled to Kaohsiung to sail back to Japan. Before they were allowed to board the ship, all their luggage had to be laid out on the dockside for inspection by the Nationalist officials. (Source: Shiozawa Ryō, 2006. Courtesy of Chang Liang-tse)
The cession of Taiwan to Japan was clearly set forth in the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki after the First Sino-Japanese War. In the following fifty years, China underwent massive changes, including the Boxer Uprising at the end of the Ch'ing Dynasty, the Revolution of 1911, dictatorship under warlords, and the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists. In the attendant political and social upheavals, China did not have time to pay attention to Taiwan. However, a small number of Taiwanese expatriates living in mainland China still cherished the hope that Taiwan could be recovered by the fatherland. In 1942 the Nationalist authorities in Ch'ungch'ing declared April 5 "Taiwan Day," and within a short time, the slogans "Recover Taiwan" and "Taiwanese Retrocession" that were publicized by the Taiwanese political activists and the Nationalist authorities became widely known. After the Cairo Conference in 1943, China, the US, and Great Britain issued a press communiqué asserting that Taiwan should be returned to China after the war. As regaining Taiwan became a real possibility, the Nationalist government formed a "Taiwan Investigative Committee" to undertake the preparatory work for the return of Taiwan to Chinese rule. A significant number of Taiwanese took part in the committee's work. These were people who were born and grew up in Taiwan, then lived and worked in KMT-led China, and thus understood the situations on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. While these preparations for the return of Taiwan were under way, a number of Taiwanese put forward suggestions to the authorities. These suggestions, viewed with hindsight, appear prophetic, and give one the uncomfortable feeling of listening to predictions of an impending disaster.

*Voice of the Taiwanese People*, a twice monthly publication, appeared in Ch'ungch'ing on April 16, 1945. In June, before Japan surrendered, a contributor who signed himself as Hsiao Shao warned
that: “For the past fifty years the Taiwanese people have longed to be reunited with their ancestral land . . . but they do not love the fatherland’s backwardness nor its irregular society.” He called upon “all citizens of the fatherland, both high and low, to look upon the Taiwanese people as students who had studied abroad in Japan for fifty years. This attitude is extremely important. If the Taiwanese people are treated as if they were merely a colony of Japan or as if they were Japan’s slaves (and most Taiwanese people are full of defiant spirit), then China’s regaining of Taiwan will be no different from China making a colony of Taiwan.”

In the October 10 issue, a contributor who signed himself as Nieh Shao put forward for the attention of the committee members a list of ten demands regarding the demobilization of Taiwan:

1. The arbitrary power exercised by the Taiwan Sōtokufu and any similar authority should be eliminated from Taiwanese society.
2. Taiwan’s system of local self-government should continue and should be improved.
3. The authorities in the fatherland should select and appoint exemplary public servants to posts in Taiwan.
4. The authorities in the fatherland should give top priority to the establishment of a new monetary system based on the current Taiwanese price index.
5. The newly established authorities (šu-yüan tang-chü, literally “the authorities for demobilization”) on Taiwan should adopt a policy of gradual replacement with regard to language and literacy.
6. The newly established authorities on Taiwan must at all costs prevent unemployment because of changes in the political situation.
7. The newly established authorities on Taiwan should guard
against any unwarranted changes to Taiwanese people’s land rights.

8. The newly established authorities on Taiwan should prevent any extreme changes of Taiwanese people’s floating or fixed capital.

9. The newly established authorities on Taiwan should grant the Taiwanese people freedom of speech, thought, and association.

10. The newly established authorities on Taiwan should prevent any excessive disorder and the entry into Taiwan of any improper practices.

Did these two contributors make their proposals and appeals because they understood China only too well, or did they unintentionally reveal their own subconscious worries and anxieties? Perhaps both, we can’t be sure. What we can be sure of is that history bears witness to the fact that the fatherland’s methods and policies in regaining Taiwan were the exact opposite of the contributors’ suggestions! And the result was the February 28 Incident.

3. The Incident

After Taiwan was handed over to the Nationalist government, Taiwan was made a province of China. However, the administrative system employed in Taiwan was not the same as that in other Chinese provinces. Instead, the province was governed by the Taiwan Provincial Administrative Executive Office. This body was similar to the former Japanese colonial government (Sōtokufu), but even more autocratic than the Sōtokufu because it combined both military and political authority in one body. This was exactly what the Voice of the Taiwanese People had referred to as “arbitrary power.” Local self-government and local elections, which had existed under Japanese rule, were not continued under the KMT, let alone
used as the basis for political improvement. Among the government officials who arrived in Taiwan there were some who upheld fairness without favoritism, but officials lacking in integrity formed the majority. This may have been a matter of common occurrence in mainland China, but in the eyes of the Taiwanese, who were used to government which was on the whole clean and just, this was unfamiliar and unexpected. The corruption was not limited to a few individuals; usually it involved collusion on a large scale between government officials and businessmen. Their objective was to strip Taiwan of its material assets and to transport them to the mainland for their own immediate personal enrichment. In this way, the “regaining of Taiwan” turned into “the plundering of Taiwan,” a pun of the day.

On a psychological level, what was hardest for Taiwanese (particularly intellectuals) to bear, was the constant repetition by the new government officials of the phrase “enslavement by education” to categorize Taiwanese as having been “poisoned” by Japanese education and as being a people of a servile nature. No account was taken of their abilities or the training they had received. Instead, almost all Taiwanese were excluded from the ranks of those who were creating the new social order. The extreme language and cultural policies of Ch’en Yi’s government tolerated no exceptions: one year after Retrocession, the Japanese language columns in the newspapers were abolished. Compared with the Japanese colonial government’s abolition of Chinese language columns in newspapers, which did not take place until forty-two years after the start of Japanese rule, this was certainly a sufficiently “iron-fisted approach,” to use Ch’en Yi’s own words. At this point we should make clear that it was of course reasonable to abolish the language of the colonizers, and Taiwanese people agreed that this was necessary. In the period just after Retrocession, cram schools for people to
learn "the national language" sprang up overnight everywhere and Taiwanese people contended with each other to learn Mandarin. For example, the novelist, Lü Ho-jo, whose novels in Japanese were regarded highly during the period of Japanese colonial rule, hurriedly changed over to writing his novels in Chinese, a change that did not prevent his subsequent death during the White Terror. Thus, the requirement for Taiwanese to learn the new national language was not the problem. The problem was that the national language had become politicized; it had been turned into a weapon for discriminating against the Taiwanese. As was the case with the catchphrase "enslavement," no fine distinctions were made; the Taiwanese were collectively belittled, and these measures all served as excuses for depriving Taiwanese of their rights.

Ch'en Yi implemented a policy of complete control of the economy through two bureaus: the Monopoly Bureau, which managed the Taiwanese domestic economy, and the Trade Bureau, which managed external trade. The authorities on Taiwan ruled that tobacco, alcohol, camphor, matches, and the instruments for weighing and measuring were subject to state monopoly. Moreover they ruled that such other items as salt, sugar, and the building material lime were semi-monopoly items also under the control of the Monopoly Bureau. The Trade Bureau took control of all external economic relations, so all goods destined for transportation to and sale in mainland China had to pass through the Trade Bureau. This not only obstructed the free flow of goods and materials between Taiwan and the mainland, it also created a breeding ground for corruption and bribery. On top of this, the Administrative Executive Office maintained a separate Taiwanese currency, prohibited the use on Taiwan of the legal tender of mainland China, and arbitrarily set the rate of exchange between the two currencies. Due to these economic controls and the large quantity of goods
and materials flowing out of the country because of bribes paid to bend the laws, Taiwan experienced currency inflation and price rises even greater than Shanghai. Unbelievably, on an island that grew its own rice and could harvest it two to three times a year, rice in Taiwan was selling for more than twice the price than in Shanghai. In January 1947 the price of rice rose dramatically, even increasing several times in a single day. Agents of the Monopoly Bureau, one of the pair of bureaus choking the Taiwanese economy, would eventually spark the February 28 Incident. Although the Incident was started by a chance event, the circumstances that made the Incident possible cannot be regarded as the product of chance.

A few days before the Incident, a contracted correspondent from the Shanghai weekly, The Observer, wrote a full and accurate news report on the situation in Taiwan. He concluded his article, "Finally, from my own observations in Taiwan, it is my intuitive feeling that Taiwan is at present threatened by growing crises, is indeed in a critical situation, and that disturbances or a rebellion could occur at any time." By the time "A Report from Taiwan" was published in the March 8 issue of The Observer, the disturbance or rebellion which he felt "could occur at any time" had already occurred.

At about seven o'clock on the evening of February 27, 1947, six investigators from the Taipei branch of the Monopoly Bureau, accompanied by four police officers from the Taipei Police Station, set out to investigate contraband tobacco selling in T'ai-p'ing Ting (present-day Yen-p'ing North Road). They confiscated money and illegal tobacco from the seller Lin-Chiang Mai (a forty-year-old widow), who wept and begged them to give back the goods. During the pushing and pulling of the dispute, someone struck Lin-Chiang Mai's head with a rifle butt so hard that her head started to bleed. This aroused the ire of onlookers, who retaliated against the
officers and damaged their Monopoly Bureau vehicle. In the chaos, investigator Fu Hsüeh-t’ung fired a warning shot to disperse the crowd, but accidentally injured a passer-by, Ch’en Wen-hsi (who died the following day). When the officers took refuge in the local police station, the crowd surrounded the police station and demanded that the gunman and his partners be handed over. The demand was to no avail, so the anger of the crowd was not dissipated.
At nine o'clock the following morning, people were on the streets beating gongs and announcing a shopkeepers' strike. A crowd of demonstrators gathered and smashed up the T'ai-p'ing Ting Second District Police Station. At noon the crowd made its way to the Taipei Branch of the Monopoly Bureau to demand that the authorities punish the culprit, but again to no avail. From there the crowd turned towards the Taiwan Provincial Administrative Executive Office (situated in the former Taihoku City Hall, nowadays the Executive Yuan) with the intention of appealing to Ch'en Yi. Around 1:00 pm there were four to five hundred demonstrators on the streets beating gongs and drums and shouting slogans in a show of strength. By this time soldiers had already been
dispatched to defend the square in front of the Executive Office. Suddenly there was the sound of gunfire. The soldiers opened fire into the crowd killing and injuring a large number of people. By this time the situation had become so serious that it was not going to be easily or quickly resolved.

Around 2:00 pm people gathered in Taipei Park (now February 28 Peace Memorial Park). They occupied the Taiwan Broadcasting Station (now the February 28 Memorial Museum) and made a province-wide broadcast calling upon the people of Taiwan to rise up against tyranny. In this way the news of the violent outbreak in Taipei was spread all over the island in an instant and in many counties and cities there were riots in response to the broadcast, turning the situation into an island-wide political protest.

Due to limitations of space, we cannot here describe in detail the circumstances of political resistance in other areas of Taiwan after February 28. Basically the February 28 Incident can be divided into two stages. The first stage lasted only eight and a half days, from February 28 until noon March 8. The military, military police, and police stationed in Taiwan were insufficient to effectively put down the rebellion because the whole of Taiwan, including the aboriginal tribes, “rose up like a swarm.” During this stage the people fought the army and police and there were deaths and casualties on both sides. Mainlanders were often the victims of revenge attacks in the streets. However, on March 8, the troops sent by the central government on the mainland landed at Keelung and Kaohsiung around noon. Upon arriving the soldiers started to clear the streets with heavy gunfire, beginning an island-wide bloody repression. From this point on the situation was dramatically reversed, with untold numbers of Taiwanese casualties and deaths. It was after March 8 that the massive slaughter occurred. This second stage of the Incident, officially designated as “Pacification” (sui-ching) and
13.12 The letter which the Taiwan Provincial Association for Political Reconstruction asked John Leighton Stuart, the American Ambassador in Nanking (Nanjing), to forward to the Chairman of the Nationalist Government of China, Chiang Kai-shek. The letter requests that Chiang Kai-shek "on no account dispatch troops to Taiwan." It is dated March 5 (1947), but by then Chiang Kai-shek had decided to send the army to suppress the Taiwanese. The association was organized by Chiang Wei-ch’uan and other Taiwanese who had joined anti-colonial movements during the period of Japanese colonial rule. Chiang Wei-ch’uan was a brother of the late Chiang Wei-shui, one of the most prominent anti-colonial leaders of that time. (From family papers of Chiang Wei-ch’uan. Courtesy of the Taipei 2/28 Memorial Museum)

“Countryside Clean-up” (ch’ing-hsiang), lasted for almost ten weeks, from March 8 to May 15. The initial spark of the February 28 Incident was not an organized or planned event but a chance incident. But afterwards, on March 2, leading Taiwanese citizens in Taipei set up a “Resolution Committee for the February 28 Incident,” and other counties followed suit and set up local committees to resolve the disturbances. The Committee could be described as the overall planning center for the Taiwanese people during the events of the next six and a half days and it was also the organization which held talks and negotiations with Ch’en Yi. However, Ch’en Yi had as early as March 2 secretly telegraphed Chiang Kai-shek and asked for troops to be dispatched to put down the rebellion, while he went through the motions of working with the Committee in order to play for time.
On March 9, Ch'en Yi declared martial law in Taipei and Keelung. The Nationalist army entered Taipei and went through the streets firing as they went. The sound of gunfire continued all day and people were constantly being seized and killed. On March 10, Chiang Kai-shek issued a statement about the emergency in Taiwan, citing Communist incitement as one of the reasons for the Incident. On the same day, Ch'en Yi ordered the disbanding of the Resolution Committees for the February 28 Incident and all other "illegal groups." The demands put forward by the Committee were later held to be proof of the crime of insurrection (Ch'en Yi's government declared that the Committee had turned into an illegal group engaged in rebel activities). All over the island the people who had taken an active part in the committees were targeted for liquidation in a campaign of arrests and summary executions, so the number of people killed from this group was particularly large.

On March 11, Operation Pacification was proclaimed and all transport and telecommunications came under strict control. On March 18, two units of the Nationalist army that had taken separate routes through the island in their mopping-up operation met up in Taitung, by which time they were in control of the whole island. On March 21, as an accompaniment to Operation Pacification, a Countryside Clean-up Operation was put into effect. On April 22, the Administrative Yuan reconstituted the Taiwan Provincial Administrative Executive Office as a provincial government with Wei Tao-ming as its Governor. On May 11, Ch'en Yi left Taiwan, and on May 15, Wei Tao-ming arrived. On the next day the provincial government of Taiwan was set up and the following important measures were announced:

1. lifting of martial law
2. the end of Operation Countryside Clean-up
3. lifting of censorship on news, books, and postal service
13.13 The Chinese and Japanese versions of the Public Notification of the Commencement of Operation Countryside Clean-up. This Notification from Ch’en Yi, the Chief Executive of the Administration of Taiwan Province and Commander-in-Chief of the Taiwan Provincial Garrison, was promulgated on March 20, 1947. In addition to the Chinese text on the front of the page, a Japanese text was printed on the back because at that time most educated Taiwanese were unable to read Chinese. (Courtesy of the late Mita Yūji)
4. abolition of all transport controls
Thus ended the February 28 Incident—an incident lasting two and a half months that included a short-lived people's uprising and peace-negotiations, followed by massacres and repression by the Nationalist military forces.

The brief chronological account given above cannot possibly convey the terror of the Operations Pacification and Countryside Clean-up, nor the fear and despair of the Taiwanese people. The suppression of Taiwanese people by the Nationalist army was extremely vindictive; there was no judicial procedure, just indiscriminate arrests and killings. For example, at the height of Operation Pacification, truckloads of those who were to be executed were transported to Keelung Garrison Headquarters, and the dead, their hands still tied, were thrown in the sea as a crude means of disposal. However, the incoming tide washed the floating corpses up on beaches, thereby informing their fellow countrymen of an unspeakable horror. Even today we do not know how many Taiwanese died in that period of bloody repression; it is almost impossible to calculate this kind of figure. The number ranges from several thousand to over 100,000. Most researchers now accept an estimate of approximately 18,000 people. People had the impression that the number of dead was much greater because most of the Taiwanese who lost their lives were leading members of society in the prime of their lives and also young people, including students. Elders, as soon as they heard that the Nationalist army had landed, told their young people to flee for their lives and many did go into hiding in the mountain regions. Under Japanese colonial rule, the cream of Taiwanese society had not easily come by their education, yet this section of society suffered disproportionate losses in the February 28 Incident. No matter what area of Taiwanese history one studies today, one comes across the sudden disappearance of
13.14 Photo of the Chiayi artist Ch’en Ch’eng-po (Tän Teng-p’o) when he was a student. Ch’en Ch’eng-po (1895–1947) studied at Tokyo Fine Arts School (1924–1927) and continued post-graduate study there (1927–1929). In 1926 his oil painting Suburb of Chiayi was selected for the Seventh Imperial Art Academy Exhibition. (See pp. 259-260) This photo was taken in a studio at the Tokyo Fine Arts School by the reporter who came to interview him after his selection for that exhibition. Subsequently, he was selected many times for the Imperial Exhibition and for other shows. After the February 28 Incident, he was arrested because he had come forward to take part in the Resolution Committee; he and three others were executed by firing squad in front of the Chiayi Railway Station on March 25, 1947. After the murder, his wife steeled herself to arrange for someone to take a photo of his corpse. In that photo, Ch’en Ch’eng-po’s eyes are still wide open and his face looks almost exactly the same as in this student photo; he looks like he could just turn over, pick up his brush, and start painting. But the reality is that his body is blood stained, his hands are already stiff and cold, the bullets which pierced his chest have robbed him of his life, and he will never turn over and get up again. Visitors to the Taipei 2/28 Memorial Museum can see for themselves the two photos of the same face—one dead, one living—there in the Museum’s display. (Courtesy of Chen Cheng Po Cultural Foundation)

the leading lights in 1947: writers, artists, educators (professors and school teachers), industrialists, people working in the media, locally elected people’s representatives, doctors, judges, public prosecutors, lawyers, local gentry, the leading aboriginals, and many others. Loss of young lives fundamentally makes people feel doubly sad because the immeasurable potential of those lives remains unrealized.
13.15 A family photo of the Taichung lawyer Lin Lien-tsong (Lim Lién-ch'ng) and his daughter Lin Hsin-chen (Lim Sin-cheng). In 1946 Lin Lien-tsong (1905–1947), in his capacity as a National Representative for Drafting the Constitution, travelled to the capital Nanking (Nanjing) in order to attend the Conference for Drawing up the Constitution of the Republic of China. After the February 28 Incident occurred, Lin Lien-tsong travelled to Taipei to participate in the Resolution Committee for the February 28 Incident. He lodged at the home of his good friend Li Jui-han (Li Sūi-hàn, 1906–1947). On March 10, military police came to Li Jui-han’s house and said that Ch’en Yi requested that he and his younger brother Li Jui-feng (Li Sūi-hóng, 1911–1947) attend a meeting with him. Lin Lien-tsong was taken away with them. The three men were never heard from again. The Li brothers and Lin Lien-tsong, who all studied in Tokyo at Chuo University’s law department, were all lawyers. (Courtesy of the Wu Sun-lien Foundation for Taiwan Historical Materials)

In less than three months Taiwan lost countless leading members of society as well as many of its young people. This is one of the reasons why the Incident has had such an enormous impact on Taiwanese society. Those of the elite who were fortunate enough to survive were either permanently traumatized or lost heart and fell silent. Taiwanese society could be described as “demoralized,” meaning not only damaged in spirit, but also “de-moralized” in the sense of morally emptied. We may ask what the after-effects must be when a society suddenly loses such a large percentage of its social and cultural elite. What would Taiwanese be like today if these lives
13.16 The last letter to his wife by Dr. Lu Ping-ch’ìn (Lò Piá’-khim) before he was killed. (Courtesy of the Taipei 2/28 Memorial Museum)

Lu Ping-ch’ìn (1912–1947), like Ch’en Ch’eng-po, was arrested because he came forward to help resolve the February 28 Incident. He and Ch’en Ch’eng-p’o, along with two other people, were executed in front of Chiayi Railway Station. The doctor had spent most of his life in Japan and Kwangtung Province of China. This is an excerpt from the last letter he wrote in Japanese from jail to his wife, Lin Hsiu-mei (Lim Sìu-hí):

My darling wife,

By tomorrow, finally, I will have passed over to the other shore. In this life I have made you endure so much. I am so indebted to you. I will surely repay you in the next life. The thing that worries me is the children. . . .

We all have to die some time. Please, no matter what happens, be strong and keep going for the sake of the children. I will look after your health from the next world! . . . But what I regret most of all is that I won’t be able to express my love for you fully. But if this is to be our fate, there’s nothing that can be done about it. In my mind’s eye I will hold your lovely image and smile as I take my leave of the world. . . .

You and the children are the reason I didn’t run away. Maybe that was stupid, but love overcomes all. . . .

Still in this body but with a spirit as if I have already passed on, I say to you: to have a wife as fine as you is ill one could ask for. I bid you farewell—Please don’t weep for me in the days to come!

Yours, Ping-ch’ìn
had not been lost, but had been able to contribute to the post-war reconstruction and development of Taiwan?

In the long run, history has shown that it was the KMT which was responsible for the February 28 Incident, but at the time those in power certainly did not acknowledge this accountability, and this has only prolonged the trauma over the issue of responsibility. Ch'en Yi went to his grave without ever admitting he was at fault. On March 24, Ch'en Yi said in a telegram to the central government: "The underlying cause of this matter [the February 28 Incident] is actually that Taiwanese people have been too profoundly enslaved by Japan and their thinking has been contaminated. The gentry who collaborated with the Japanese have still not been punished. The newspapers are not banned strictly enough from publishing dreadful slanders. I have erred on the side of leniency and the result has been this hatching of plots." Unfortunately we are unable to put the following question to Ch'en Yi: The severe criticism that you received came not only from Taiwanese people but also from mainland Chinese. Does this mean that you think mainlanders were also "profoundly enslaved by Japan and their thinking has been contaminated"? Ch'en Yi made many other unfounded allegations against the Taiwanese people in his telegrams. Furthermore, he denied that the February 28 Incident stemmed from the people's collective dissatisfaction with the Executive Office: "In summary, this emergency was entirely caused by a few 'troublemakers' who intended to incite a revolt. It was certainly not a people's movement demanding improvement in government and changes in the economic system such as the Monopoly and Trade Bureaus." This is a prime example of a clumsy lie that confirms what it attempts to deny. The February 28 Incident was not caused by a few people trying to start a rebellion; it was precisely about the people's demand for improvement in the government and
changes in the economic system. After Ch'en Yi left Taiwan, he was appointed first as an adviser to the Nationalist government, and then the following year he assumed the office of Governor of Chekiang (Zhejiang) Province. In February 1949, he was put under house arrest in the Chekiang city of Ch'üchou for “communicating with the Communists.” In April of that year he was sent to Taiwan under escort, and on June 18, 1950, he was executed by firing squad, but that had absolutely nothing to do with his role in the February 28 Incident!

If Ch'en Yi was unable to reflect on the Incident because he was still too close to the Incident itself, let us consider the attitude of K'o Yüan-fen, who was Chief of the General Staff of the Taiwan Provincial Garrison Command at the time of the February 28 Incident. More than forty years later, in 1989, he still maintained the following opinions:

... some of our Taiwanese compatriots were very unhappy about the Retrocession, particularly the gentry who had collaborated with the Japanese during the colonial period and those who had joined the Association of Imperial Public Service. Also the wicked gentry and local tyrants who had accepted property from the Japanese. When they found that their foreign protectors were defeated, they longed for their former overlords and they slandered and regarded with hostility the incoming officials from the fatherland. The most regrettable thing was that the Taiwanese-born soldiers and idle vagrants, who had been used by the Japanese and had assisted the Japanese army in its humiliation of mainland Chinese, had become so used to doing this over a long period of time that it had become a habit. After they fell from power and were repatriated to Taiwan, for a time they were unable to obtain jobs, but in fact they did not want to work and developed an unfounded resentment toward the fatherland and the people and officials who came to Taiwan from mainland China. They
were the ambitious conspirators and rioters who brought about the Incident.

That K'o Yüan-fen could hold such opinions forty years after the event and despite the changed environment around him, makes one sigh at the inherent difficulty of different factions of people ever understanding one another. Today, even though a memorial monument has been erected in the February 28 Peace Park, Taiwan society has still not reached a genuine consensus about the February 28 Incident.
The White Terror is a term very familiar to Taiwanese today because they have heard it repeated so often, but most people do not know why it is called "white." Just as colors have been heavily politicized in Taiwan today, where the perfectly innocent colors blue, green, and orange all have political meanings,* in twentieth-century world history, "red" represents communism, and therefore any power opposed to the Communist Party is designated white, and often refers to fascism. Because both the communist and the fascist camps often resort to terror as a means in their power struggles, we have the symmetry of "red terror" and "white terror." The KMT's White Terror did not start in Taiwan, for its original aim was to counter Communists on the Chinese mainland, but only on the small island of Taiwan could the net of terror be drawn so tightly and the methods become so brutal. Why did this happen to Taiwan? Because this little island, which had only recently been returned to China, was involuntarily drawn into the power struggle that was raging between the KMT and the Communist Party across the length and breadth of continental China.

On January 1, 1949, the central government appointed Ch'en Ch'eng as Governor of Taiwan Province. At that time Ch'en Ch'eng was an extremely important figure within the KMT government. His appointment to head the administration of a peripheral island was a portent that Taiwan would play an important role on the Chinese political scene. On January 31, the Communist People's Liberation Army formally entered Peking (Beijing). On April 21, the Communist army crossed the Yangtze River, and three days later a large number of planes filled with fleeing government officials and

* Being the dominant color on the party flag of the KMT, blue is associated with the KMT. Similarly, green appears on the flag of the Democratic Progressive Party, so it is associated with the DPP. A third party, the People First Party, is associated with orange.
their families flew from Shanghai to Taiwan. On May 19, perhaps foreseeing that Taiwan would be the final base that the KMT could withdraw to and defend, Ch'en Ch'eng proclaimed martial law on Taiwan. As in 1947, the implementation of martial law meant government by the military. Taiwan’s martial law was only lifted in 1987. It lasted a full thirty-eight years, the longest period of martial law in the world during the twentieth century.

At this juncture we must go back in time a little to look at a law which had been passed previously. On May 10, 1948, the Nationalist KMT government in Nanking (Nanjing) announced that it would implement the “Temporary Provisions Effective During the Period of National Mobilization for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion,” partially suspending the constitution and establishing the “System of Mobilization for Suppression of Rebellion.” On May 24, 1949, the Legislative Yuan passed the “Traitors Punishment Act.” The following year, in 1950, it passed an amendment to this Act, the content of which was even more severe and which created an airtight rule of terror. Article 2, Item 1 of the Traitors Punishment Act stated: “the punishment for masterminding insurrection is death.” This rule was commonly referred to as “Article 2:1,” and it signified certain death. For almost forty years the mere mention of Article 2:1 terrified the people of Taiwan.

On December 7, 1949, the government of the Republic of China retreated to Taiwan. The retreat of 1949, viewed merely as a logistical exercise, had an undeniably epic quality, and someone of a poetic turn might have described it with the well-known phrase: “capable of moving one to song and to tears.” Tourists who have visited the National Palace Museum in Taipei might well pause to consider how these treasures of human civilization left Peking in 1931 because of the Japanese invasion of northern China and started their wandering life, traversing a sum total of 30,000 kilometers by
14.1 In 1948 a continuous stream of retreating Nationalist troops were leaving the mainland. This is a photo of Chinese tanks that are about to be shipped to Taiwan on transport ships. (Source: Darrell Berrigan, 1949)

various routes, in wartime, and finally came to rest by the distant Waishuang River in the suburbs of Taipei. How could one not be moved by this? The 3,000–4,000 year old oracle bone writings and bronzes excavated by archaeologists from the Yin ruins in Anyang of Henan Province made a similarly tortuous journey to end up in rainy Nankang in eastern Taipei. This large-scale retreat meant that a scholar like Hu Shih, well-known both in China and abroad, also came to this small island. Taiwan was then poised to absorb the essence of mainland Chinese culture and be a starting point for rejuvenation, but the KMT's subsequent policies and actions nullified this possibility.

As we mentioned above, the White Terror did not begin on Taiwan and it was not directed at the Taiwanese people in particular. Its aim was to root out “Communist bandits” and their
14.2 From the time the Nationalist government retreated to Taiwan right up until 1987, when martial law was lifted, the two sides were in a constant state of tension and antagonism. The Nationalist government retained the islands of Quemoy (aka Kinmen or Jimei) and Matsu, which lay distant from Taiwan 188 km and 164 km respectively. (Source: Frankfurt Illustration, September 27, 1959)

influence. (In the KMT regime's official usage, "Communist bandits" referred to Chinese Communists and when "bandit" was used as an adjective, it was equivalent to "Communist.") Thus, even before the Nationalist government moved to Taiwan, there were several cases on Taiwan of people being reported to the authorities and their cases implicating many other people. We should bear in mind that the KMT regime's move to Taiwan entailed the relocation onto a very small island of a political apparatus large enough to govern a vast country. Although the Nationalist KMT regime had suffered a crushing defeat on the Chinese mainland, its military,
14.3 Liu Yao-t'ing and Liu Shih Yüeh-hsia—a couple separated forever by the White Terror. Liu Yao-t'ing (1925–1954), a graduate of law from Waseda Professional College in Tokyo, was arrested in October 1952 and was executed by firing squad on January 29, 1954 for the crime of “insurrection.” When Liu Yao-t'ing was arrested his wife was six months pregnant, and after his death his wife wandered from place to place, with her twin daughters, who had never seen their father. Life was extremely hard for them and their status remained very low until she remarried. The daughters had to face social discrimination as they grew up, causing feelings of inferiority and insecurity. (Courtesy of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica)

14.4 A page of a 1954 calendar freezing the “death” date forever in time. Liu Yao-t'ing's wife tore the page off the calendar on the date of his execution and kept it. Under the number 29 is printed a familiar slogan of the period: “Fighting to save the state and the people.” (Courtesy of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica)

Police, and intelligence systems were more than enough to control Taiwan. In order to eliminate real and false “communist bandits” and their real or imagined influence, the intelligence units of the KMT imprisoned many people. It is estimated that between 1950 and the lifting of martial law in 1987, there were over 2,500 political trials in Taiwan. Approximately 140,000 individuals were implicated and penalized to varying degrees. Between three and four thousand of these people were executed. The people prosecuted included
mainland Chinese, Han Taiwanese, and aborigines. There were also women and students among those numbers. In the 1950s the majority of the cases alleged links to the Communists, whereas after 1960 most of the cases involved Taiwanese Independence. As cases
14.6 The Atayal leader Losin Watan (Chinese name: Lin Ju-ch'ang) is the man in the black western suit on the left. He is accompanying Chiang Kai-shek (center foreground, wearing black cape and fedora) on an inspection tour of Chiapanshan (today's Fuhsing Township in Taoyuan County, an area that still has a high concentration of Atayal today). Losin Watan's father, Watan Shetsu, was the chief of the nearby Bng'ciq Village, in today's Sanhsia, New Taipei City. Between 1900 and 1907 the father had led these people in the fight against the Japanese, incurring heavy losses. In 1907 he was compelled to surrender. In 1916 Losin Watan attended Taiwan Sotokufu Medical School and after graduation he returned to serve as a doctor in his home village. In 1945 he was nominated Councillor in the Taiwan Sotokufu, which was the highest post attainable by an aboriginal within the colonial system. After the war, Losin Watan petitioned the Nationalist government for the return of his family's land, but he received no reply from the government. In 1948 he became a Councillor in the new Taiwan Provincial Administrative Executive Office, and went on in 1951 to be elected as a member of the first Taiwan Provincial Assembly. In 1950, when Uyongu Yatauyungana, the leader of the Tsou people of Mt. Ali, set up the Hsin-mei Farm, Losin Watan used his status as a member of the Assembly to stand as guarantor for that loan. In 1952, as part of the "Mountain Aboriginals Espionage Case" he was arrested at the same time as Uyongu Yatauyungana and others. Two years later, he and five other aboriginal leaders were all executed. The photo above shows Chiang Kai-shek's inspection
of “banditry and espionage” were often fabricated, they became a convenient method for getting rid of dissidents during power struggles and they sometimes involved high-ranking people, as in the case against General Sun Li-jen.* Such methods were also used in the intelligence units’ internal fighting, so that there were cases of the special prosecutors of “banditry and espionage” themselves falling victim to this charge. On top of this, rewards, including shares of the confiscated property of the accused, were given both to those who informed in a “banditry and espionage” case and to those who successfully conducted the case. These pecuniary incentives led to many unjust verdicts because special agents motivated by greed fabricated false charges.

Younger Taiwanese who did not grow up under the White Terror probably find it difficult to understand the extent of the “Terror.” It is their good fortune not to know and the older generation should be really glad for them, from the bottom of our

* Sun Li-jen (1900-1990), a famous general in the War of Resistance against Japan, was born in Luchiang of Anhui Province, China. He went to the United States to study in 1923 and returned to China in 1928. In the 1930s Sun was in charge of the modernization of the Nationalist army in Taiwan, with the support of the United States. He had conflicts with Chiang Ching-kuo (son of President Chiang Kai-shek) when Chiang’s party-political system was permeating the military. Sun’s close ties with the United States had long irritated President Chiang. In June 1955, he was placed under house arrest on the pretext of planning a coup d’état. More than 300 of his subordinates were implicated. He was released in 1988 by President Lee Teng-hui after thirty-three years of confinement and died two years later.

tour of Chiang Ching-kuo in Taiwan. Following behind are General Sung Ch’ang-chih (the tall man with the military cap) and Chiang Kai-shek’s son Chiang Ching-kuo (between General Sung and Losin Watan). (Courtesy of Lin Jih-lung)
14.7 Female political prisoners on Green Island. Prior to the lifting of martial law (July 15, 1987) Green Island was Taiwan’s offshore prison for political prisoners. The women prisoners in the photo are wearing gray uniforms with the characters “New Life” embroidered on the front because they were in the New Life Correctional Section, which was Green Island’s concentration camp for political prisoners. Nearly two thousand people were imprisoned in the camp during the time it operated (1951–1965), with most prisoners serving sentences of more than ten years. The Women’s Unit imprisoned approximately 100 victims. (Courtesy of the Central News Agency)

hearts. Maybe some readers will innocently ask: “If one is not guilty, surely one does not confess.” Well, under normal circumstances it is true that innocent people would not confess to a crime. But interrogation under torture was the ultimate weapon of the White
Terror. Those prosecuting these cases interrogated the accused with torture until they obtained statements. They then used the statements to implicate other people, and then made convictions based on all the statements. Faced with interrogation under torture and the limitations of the body, unable to endure any more physical damage, people could only betray themselves. In an even more frightening betrayal, they implicated their friends and even people they had never met. This was the most terrifying aspect of the White Terror.

During the White Terror, the name “Garrison Command” (Ching-pei tsung-su-li-pu, abbreviated as Ching-tsung) struck fear into nearly everyone who heard it, including university students. The author was at university in the final years of the White Terror. Of course, they are only now regarded as “the final years,” for at the time no one knew if the Terror would ever end. When I was in my second year, the father of a senior student was implicated in a “Communist bandit espionage case,” but at the time none of us knew anything about it. Not until more than twenty years later did I hear a whisper of the “Great Double Highway Communist Bandit Espionage Case,” which involved between twenty and thirty high-level technicians. (The “Double Highway” refers to the Department for Railways and the Department for Road Transport). After the student's father confessed under torture to the crimes which his interrogators wanted him to confess to, he was sentenced to twelve years imprisonment, of which he served seven years. It seems unbelievable now to think that serious incidents like this were happening all around us. How could there not be a word about them? How come not even family members dared to disclose such information? In fact, there was no need to intimidate us with real cases, we were already terrified enough. There was a saying at that time: “everyone has a miniature Garrison Command in his mind,”
14.8 Group photo of Shih Shui-huan and Shih Chih-ch'eng with friends and a nephew. This photo, brimming with youthful energy, later became a memento for their remaining family and friends of the time before the claustrophobia of the White Terror. Back row, from left to right: Shih Shui-huan (death penalty), Ting Yao-tiao (death penalty), Ch'en Cheng-hung. Front row, from left to right: Chang Ts'ang-han (seven-year prison sentence), Wu Tung-leh (death penalty), Shih Chih-ch'eng (missing, fate unknown). Shih Shui-huan and Shih Chih-ch'eng were sister and brother from Tainan City. Shih Shui-huan was born in 1925, arrested on July 19, 1954, and executed in 1956. Shih Chih-ch'eng graduated from the Department of Plant Pathology and Entomology, National Taiwan University. He became a fugitive and was never heard from again. The youngest person in the photo, Ch'en Cheng-hung, still a minor, as can be seen from the fashion of his clothes, did not get embroiled in any of the cases. Lin Yüeh-sheng, not in the photo, was a good friend of Shih Chih-ch'eng at National Taiwan University. Because Shih Chih-ch'eng spent a few hours at Lin's dormitory while a fugitive, Lin Yüeh-sheng was arrested on July 23, 1954, and sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment. (Courtesy of the late Lin Yüeh-sheng; reproduced by Taiwan ART-IN Design & Construction)
meaning that we should pay attention to and examine our own words and thoughts just as an official of the Garrison Command would. “Self-censorship” is just what it says it is.

At this juncture we should point out that during the period of the White Terror, not everyone felt the threat of the Terror. The ruling elite and those groups deeply convinced of its ideology (including young people and students) were often completely unaware of it and went freely about their business. Therefore, a good student growing up within the framework of the KMT educational system could graduate, marry, start a career, and never have any personal experience or have any information from outside that framework. Thirty years on such a person might still be unable to understand the White Terror and the damage it did to “others.” Completely different experiences of history give rise to completely different memories of that history. To comprehend the history of victims who do not belong to one’s own “kind,” and to integrate this into one’s own consciousness requires both imagination and an extraordinary solicitude for those others.

On July 14, 1987, the President of the Republic of China, Chiang Ching-kuo (son of Chiang Kai-shek and former director of the secret police, 1950–1965), declared that martial law would be terminated the next day. Only after the end of martial law did Taiwanese society leave behind the years of the White Terror.